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Faculty Express Excitement for Fall Quarter with New Vaccination Requirement in Place

Ashley Hagar, Staff Reporter

As vaccination rates are increasing and restrictions are loosening, Seattle University has announced its plan to return to primarily in-person classes in the fall. While students, faculty and staff will be able to see each other face-to-face for the first time in the classroom in over a year there are still some logistics to be worked out.

Much of the return to in-person education relies on the vaccination rollout. With all individuals over the age of 16 in Washington state now eligible for the COVID-19 vaccines, many members of the Seattle U community are looking to get vaccinated. Seattle U announced a new vaccination requirement April 13, in an email sent by President Steven V. Sundborg S.J. sharing the requirement for anyone returning to campus in the fall.

"A key component to opening safely and returning to in-person consistent with public health guidelines is the requirement that all Seattle U students—undergraduate, graduate and professional—be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 and report it to the university prior to arriving on campus in the fall," Sundborg wrote in the email.

Much like the measles immunization requirement and recommendation of other vaccines already in place, students will have to register their vaccination status prior to returning in the fall. The COVID-19 immunization requirement will follow the existing protocols of other vaccination requirements for Seattle U.

Before the Seattle U community receives all details about how to register their vaccine with the university, students, faculty and staff are encouraged to voluntarily share their vaccination status at Safe Start Health Check.

Provost Shane Martin shared why the vaccination requirement was put in place for returning in the fall.

"The leadership of Seattle U desires to keep students as safe and healthy as possible. The vaccine requirement is one important factor in doing so," Martin said. "We weighed the pros and cons of making this a requirement and believed that it was in the best interest of our students and campus community to require the COVID-19 vaccine."

In his email, Sundborg added that students with documented medical or religious exemptions will not be required to receive the vaccine. Associate Vice President and Dean of Students, James Willette, discussed the exemption process in more detail.

"We understand that many of our international students may be coming from regions where the vaccine is not as widely available and will be working on a case-by-case basis to assist these students with meeting the vaccine requirement," Willette said. "Students who do not meet an exemption criterion and choose not to get vaccinated will not be able to take in-person classes or live on campus."



Andrew Mori

Beyond the vaccination requirement, Seattle U will continue to follow necessary precautions. Anyone on campus will continue to have to wear a face covering, follow social distancing protocols and fill out the Safe Start Health Check screening survey daily. Martin and Willette also shared that classrooms may limit their density if appropriate, enhanced ventilation systems will be used within public spaces on campus and some Plexiglass barriers will be installed where necessary.

Seattle U will also continue to test students living on campus through its surveillance testing program during fall quarter. There will continue to be university housing set aside for isolation and quarantine space if necessary.

After over a year of online learning, faculty members are eager to return to the in-person experience. While precautions for the pandemic will remain in place, Seattle U faculty and staff hope to provide a safe environment for students to return to.

Associate Professor and Chair of the Communication and Media department, Rick Malleus, encourages faculty, staff and students to get vaccinated as soon as possible and to continue listening to health authorities to ensure the safety of themselves and others. Without hesitation about returning to in-person classes, Malleus expressed his excitement about shifting back to this teaching style.

“COVID-19 has shown itself to be unpredictable and it is my hope that with wide vaccination up-take over the summer, sensible health regulation and guidance, and the Seattle U community living out our stated value of caring for each other as whole persons, that whatever plan is in place when fall rolls around will be what is best for the Seattle U community of which I am a part,” Malleus said.

Seattle U will continue to monitor guidance from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and public health officials to adapt as necessary. Students should expect to have a sense of normalcy again as they return to being in the classroom face-to-face with their professors and peers again.